

## News Release

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### **Final flight a family affair**

By Sgt. Scott Akanewich

FORT IRWIN, Calif. --- When Chief Warrant Officer John Lund first sat behind the controls of an Army helicopter 26 years ago, he began a journey that would take him through the skies over three continents and thousands of hours of flight time.

Finally, over a quarter-century later, it brought him here.

A small patch of concrete in the middle of the Mojave Desert known as Bicycle Lake Army Airfield.

It was here he made his final ascent as an Army aviator before retiring after over 5,700 hours of flight time. However, it wasn't the ride that made this routine jaunt over the rocks and sand of the High Desert special, it was Lund's co-pilot, his son, Chief Warrant Officer Christopher Lund, an Army flier in his own right.

The two climbed into an OH-58C Kiowa and off they went through the shadow of the mountains looming nearby on what the elder Lund called a "heritage flight."

To him, the opportunity to fly alongside his son during his final mission was the chance of a lifetime.

"I was able to share the experience with my son," said Lund. "Also, I found out he's a great pilot with a high degree of skill."

According to Lund, Army aviation has come a long way since the days when Hueys ruled the sky in the post Vietnam era.

"The biggest difference is we're focusing on the current and future battle," he said. "Back then, I was trained by pilots who had flown in Vietnam."

As a result, they were a bit set in their ways.

"They didn't like to fly nap of the earth," said Lund, referring to the technique modern pilots use to fly low along the contour of the land.

More than just the mentality of Army aviation has changed since 1979, though.

"The survival equipment and tactics have matured," said Lund. "Now, it's all about lessons learned."

Also, even after all these years of flying, Lund still doesn't cut corners when it comes to safety.

The two went through a myriad of internal and external checks before takeoff, all the while advice from many years ago resonating in Lund's head.

"No mission can make your career, but one can end it," he said of words he heard from a wise, old pilot earlier in his days as a young flier.

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As for how his co-pilot on this day got to the seat next to his father, Christopher Lund is still amazed he's followed so closely in the family footsteps.

"It was my decision," he said, although flying is in his blood. "I grew up around aviation."

While flying, pilots exist in a vacuum only they can understand. When man first began to dream of flight, this is what they had in mind.

To see things from a different perspective.

To be free of gravity.

To do something the majority of people never get to experience.

"I see things others can't," said Lund. "Few people get to see these things."

So, how does this make him feel?

"I just grin on every flight," he said. "You know they pay us to do this?"

Something else that has brought Lund a tremendous amount of gratification over the course of his career has been passing on his passion for flight to young pilots, especially those eager to learn.

"I've been an instructor since 1981 when I was a W-1," he said. "There's a satisfaction in teaching someone who wants to learn and helping them. It's all about seeing someone accomplish something."

So, what does it take to be a pilot?

"The will and the want," said Lund. "You have to have the drive."

Of course, anything this worth while isn't easy.

"If it were easier, everybody would do it," he said.

Earning your wings as an Army pilot requires first, attendance of Warrant Officer Candidate School, followed by flight school. In all, nearly a year of training, but well worth it, said Lund. "Your career is what you make it," he said.

Lund chose to end his career at Fort Irwin. "This is the only place I was going to stay in the Army," said Lund, who also spent a stint here earlier in his career. "NTC makes sense to me. All I have to do is train Soldiers and do it safely."

Warrant officers are a different type of Soldier, who exist somewhere in between commissioned officers and the enlisted ranks. They are technical experts in their respective fields, but without the command responsibility of a regular officer. This makes for some interesting expectations as well as perceptions, said Lund.

"I think if people view you as competent, they give you more responsibility," he said. "We don't necessarily hold command positions, but I know a lot of commissioned pilots who wish they were warrants because we fly more."

This being said, Lund has held and still holds his fair share of responsibility as far as NTC aviation is concerned. As G-3 aviation commander, he works closely with the Federal Aviation Administration to

ensure the skies above Fort Irwin remain free of commercial airline traffic, what he refers to as “influencing the airspace.”

“We need to maintain the ability to be able to shoot artillery, fire mortars and fly lights-out,” he said. “Some things are just not compatible.”

Once the two had returned to the airfield, they were left to reflect on what had just taken place.

“I think it’s something we’re always going to look back on,” said Christopher Lund.

As for the elder Lund, who plans on taking a part-time contracted flying job at Fort Irwin after his retirement, he still has the same passion for flying he did when he first strapped himself into that training aircraft all those years ago. “Flying has never gotten old,” he said with a smile. “I do what others only dream of.”



Chief Warrant Officer 5 Lund (right) with son and fellow Army pilot Chief Warrant Officer Christopher Lund before their “heritage flight,” the elder Lund’s last flight on active duty. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Scott Akanewich)